

The Cholas - Architecture

The Cholas

Cholas emerged as a powerful dynasty during the 900 AD, triumphing over the Pallavas, Pandyas, Chalukyas and Rashtrakutas.

They ruled from 900 AD for about 250 years, spreading their territory as far as Ganges in North to Ceylon in South and upto Burma.

They had a strong Army of cavalry and infantry, and upto 600 war elephants.

Their navy was well equipped and strong and could hence control lands around Sri Lanka upto Sumatra and traded with Indoneasia too.

Tanjavur was the Capital of Chola dynasty from 836 - 1267 AD

Art & Society

Sculptures in Stone and Bronze.

Gave importance to development of Education
Women were given high status and freedom

Sections of society was based on Varnasrama, divided into Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras



Chola Architecture: 900 AD to 1150 AD

Typical features of Early Temples:

1. Temples of modest proportions
2. Built entirely of stone
3. These show Dravidian style in formative stages
4. Use of well dressed stone
5. Pallavan influence observed in the Vimana - similar to the rathas
6. Treatment - simplification of the exteriors compared to the pallavas with elimination of the details
7. Absence of the lion motifs and pillar
8. The Capital is modified to by addition of a neck moulding padmabandham and the pot kalasa.



The Brihadishwara temple in Thanjavur represents the pinnacle of Chola architecture, sculpture, painting, bronze castings.

It was built by Rajaraja I (985-1014 CE) at a time when the empire covered most of southern India and Sri Lanka and even included colonies in what is now Indonesia.

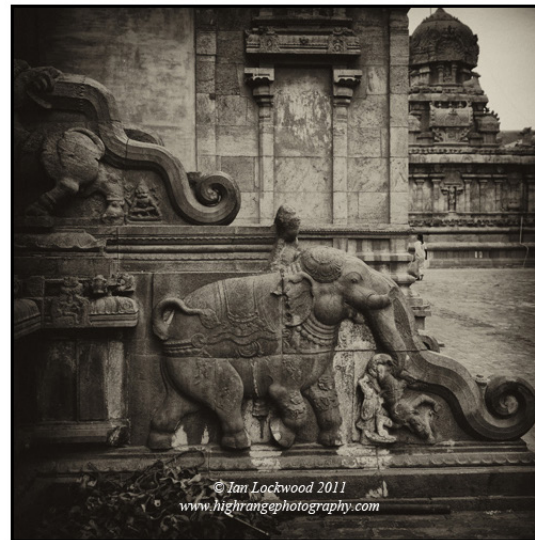
It is interesting to sight linkages with Sri Lanka having seen evidence of both the art and wrath of the Cholas in Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa.

Rajaraja Chola I laid the foundations and took 6 years to complete.

An expression of Cholas wealth, power and artistic expertise, as seen in architecture, sculpture, painting and bronze casting.

Temple was a site of major royal ceremonies







Brihadeeshwara temple, Tanjore



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BRIHADESHWAR TEMPLE

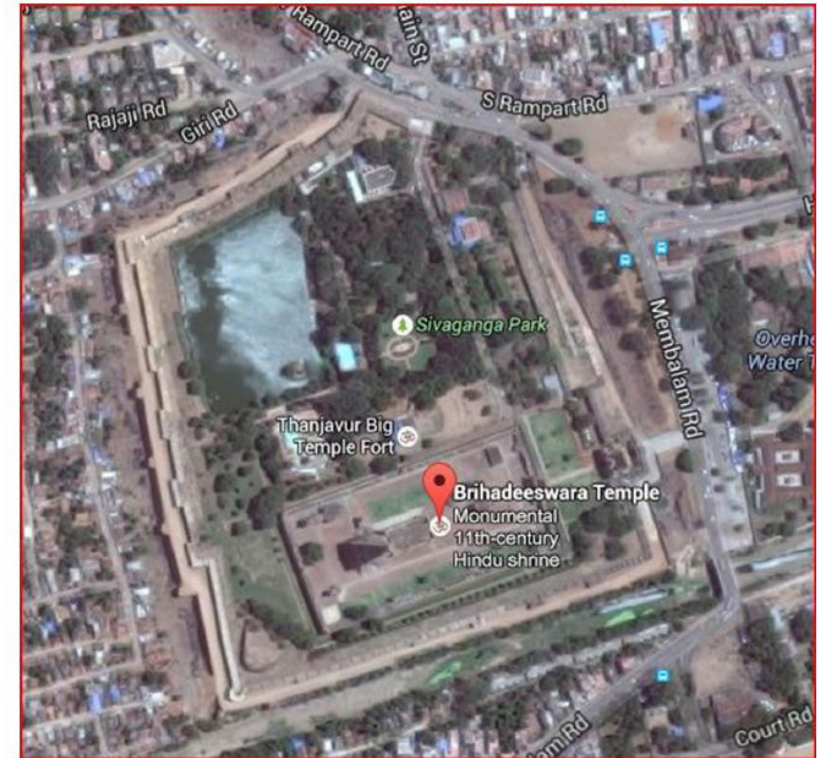
- Brihadeshwara Temple in thanjavur is one of the largest temples in India which is built by emperor Rajendra Chola I and completed in 1010 AD.
- This temple is also known as Peruvudaiyar Kovil, Periya Kovil or Big Temple, Raja Rajeswara Temple and Rajarajeswaram.
- The temple tower is the tallest one in the world which is 216 ft high. And the kumbam in the tower weighs about 80 tonnes.
- For the construction of the temple, more than 130,000 tonnes of granite was used. Surprisingly, these heavy stones were brought down from a place that was located 50 miles away from the Brihadeeshwar temple.
- A unique feature about the temple is, it is the only temple wherein the Temple tower's (Gopuram) shadow does not appear on the ground at noon.
- The king Raja Raja Cholan built the temple after his visit to Sri Lanka. The king was inspired after witnessing the Vedic structures built by the Hindu kings.

■ The Brihadeeswara Temple at Tanjavur was constructed around 1000 AD

■ The largest, highest and most ambitious project at its time – a landmark in the evolution of South Indian Architecture

■ Superb architectural treatment and Proportions

■ The main structure is 180' long above which is the tower 190' high

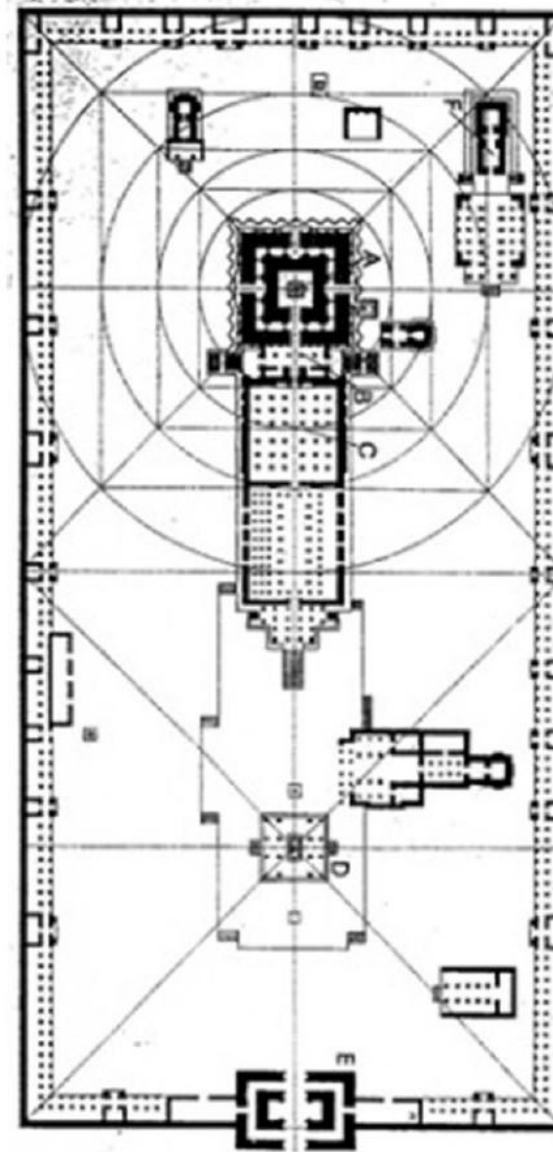


- Brihadeshwara Temple (locally known as "Big temple") is a Hindu temple dedicated to Shiva located in Thanjavur in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.
- The temple was built in a courtyard measuring 240 X 120m in the ratio of 1:2
- Granite is used for construction.
- Inner sanctum is square.
- The wall and plinth of the temple are carved out of Chola, Pandya, Vijayanagar, Nayaka and Maratha rulers.
- Axial planning.



Planning:

- Dedicated to Shiva
- Surrounded by 2 walled precincts
- The first one measures 270m x 140 m consisting of a high wall running along the banks of the river Kaveri
- The 2nd wall consists of a portico with a double row of pillars, measures 150m x 75m
- The Temple is entered through
- The perimeter wall forms a rectangular cloister which could be divided into 2 squares
- The center of the 1st square contains the Nandi Pavilion and the 2nd contains the Cella
- Over the cella is the main Gopuram 60m high and 15m at its base



A. Garbha griha

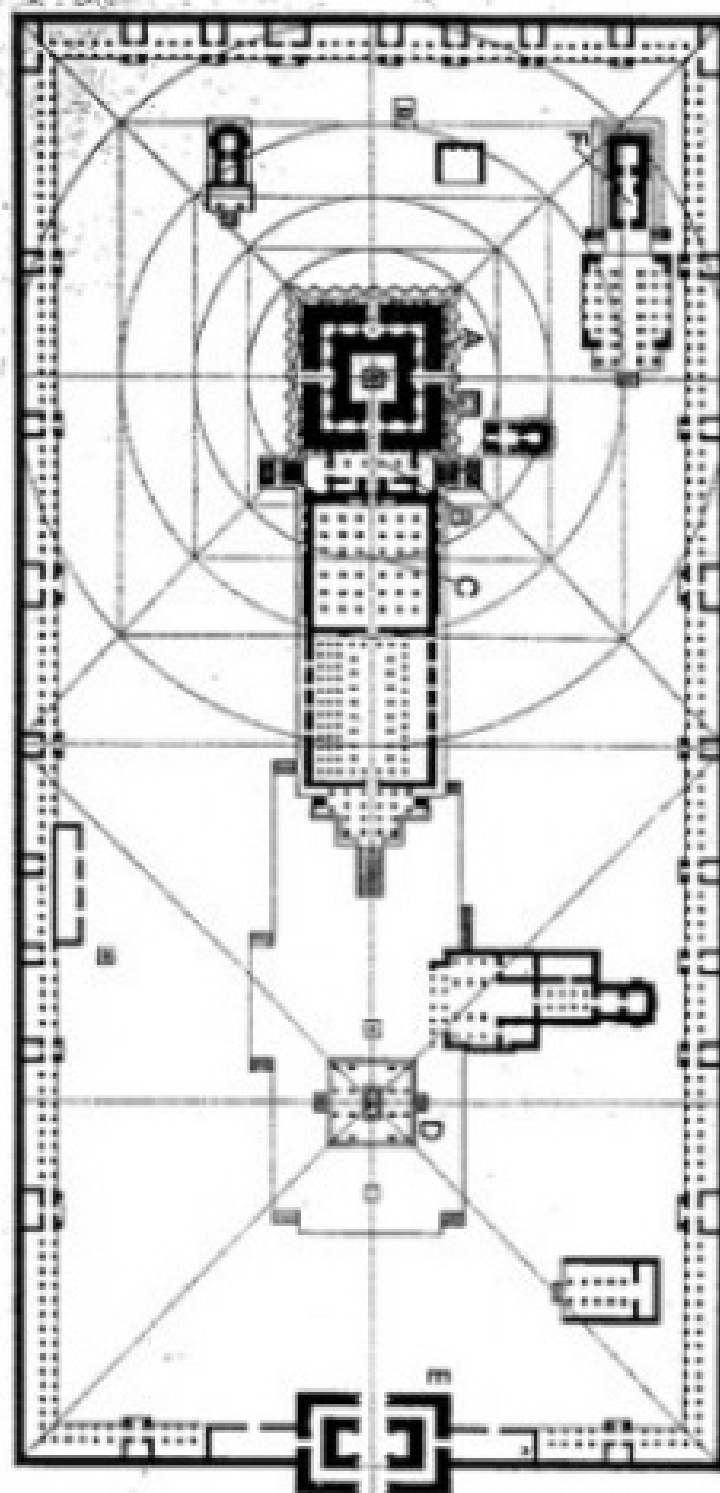
B Ardha mandapa

C Maha mandapa

D Nandi mandapa

E Gopura

F Upa devata (Subramanya)



A. Garbha griha

B. Ardha mandapa

C. Maha mandapa

D. Nandi mandapa

E. Gopura

F. Upa devata (Subramanya)

Plan

■ The Garbhagriha is a mere 5m square surrounded by a thick wall with a narrow corridor

■ Axial planning

■ The main cella is preceded by 2 hypostyle halls and a narrow vestibule

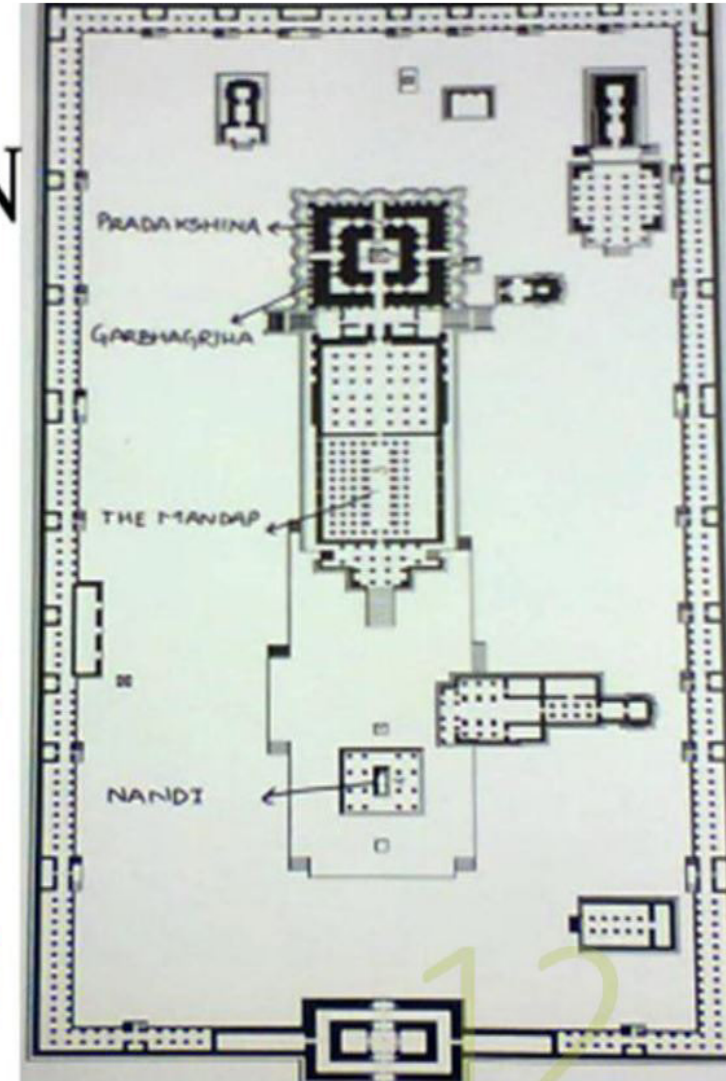
■ Entered through a pillared portico on the west

THE Great Brihadeshwar Temple , Tanjore

PLAN

The Great Nandhi:

- Big statue of Nandi(sacred bull), carved out of a single rock, at the entrance.
- The Nandhi-12 feet high, 19.5 feet long and 18.25 feet wide.
- Weighing about 20 tones.
- Stone was brought over from the bed of the River Narmada in the north



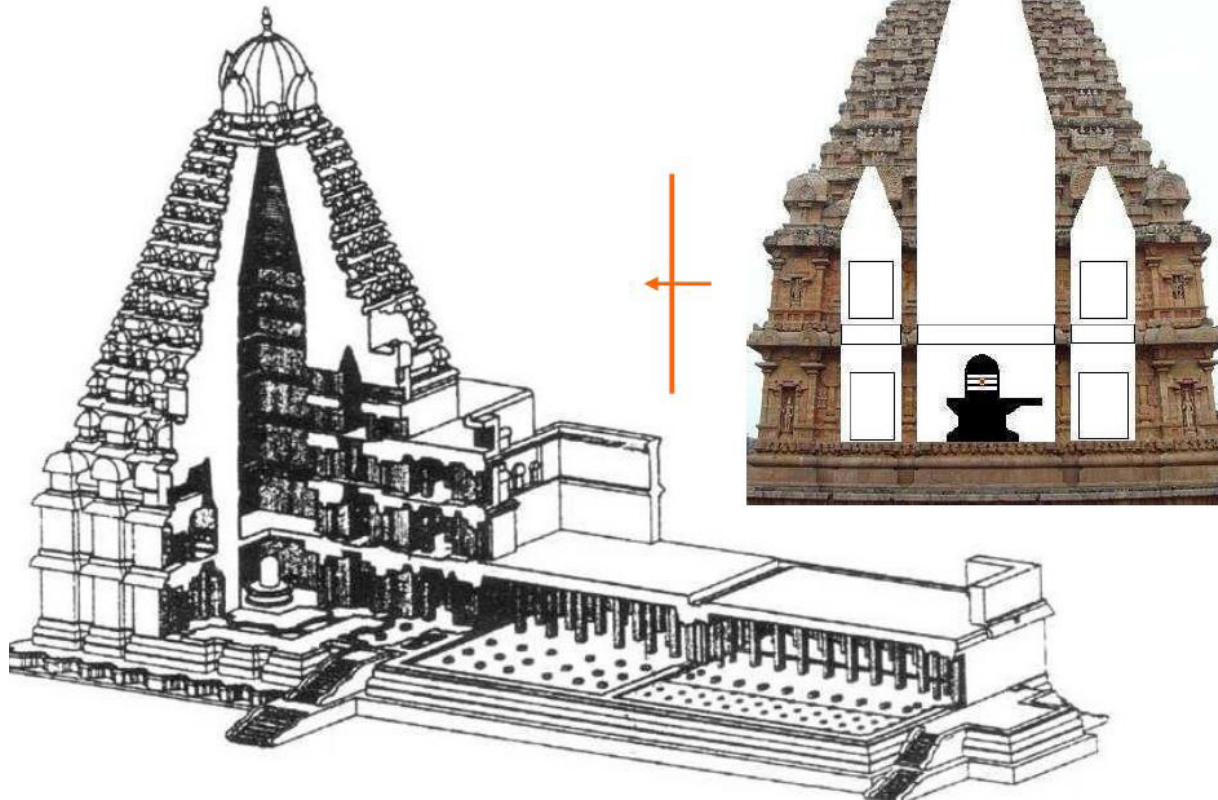
CHOLA ARCHITECTURE

Brihadeeswara Temple Thanjavur – 1000 AD

Components of Vimana:

The main Vimana is a huge solid block consisting of 3 parts:

1. Square vertical base
2. Tall tapering body
3. Domical finial



Vertical base:

- Square of 82' rising to a ht. of 50'
- The square vertical base rises for 2 stories to accommodate the Linga which was increased in ht.
- An upper gallery was hence added creating a 2nd storey, with the 2 levels of the tower receiving the same treatment

Pyramidal portion:

13 diminishing stories until the width of the apex is 1/3 base

Cupola:

On the square platform stands the cupola, the inward curve of the neck breaking the rigid outlines of the composition



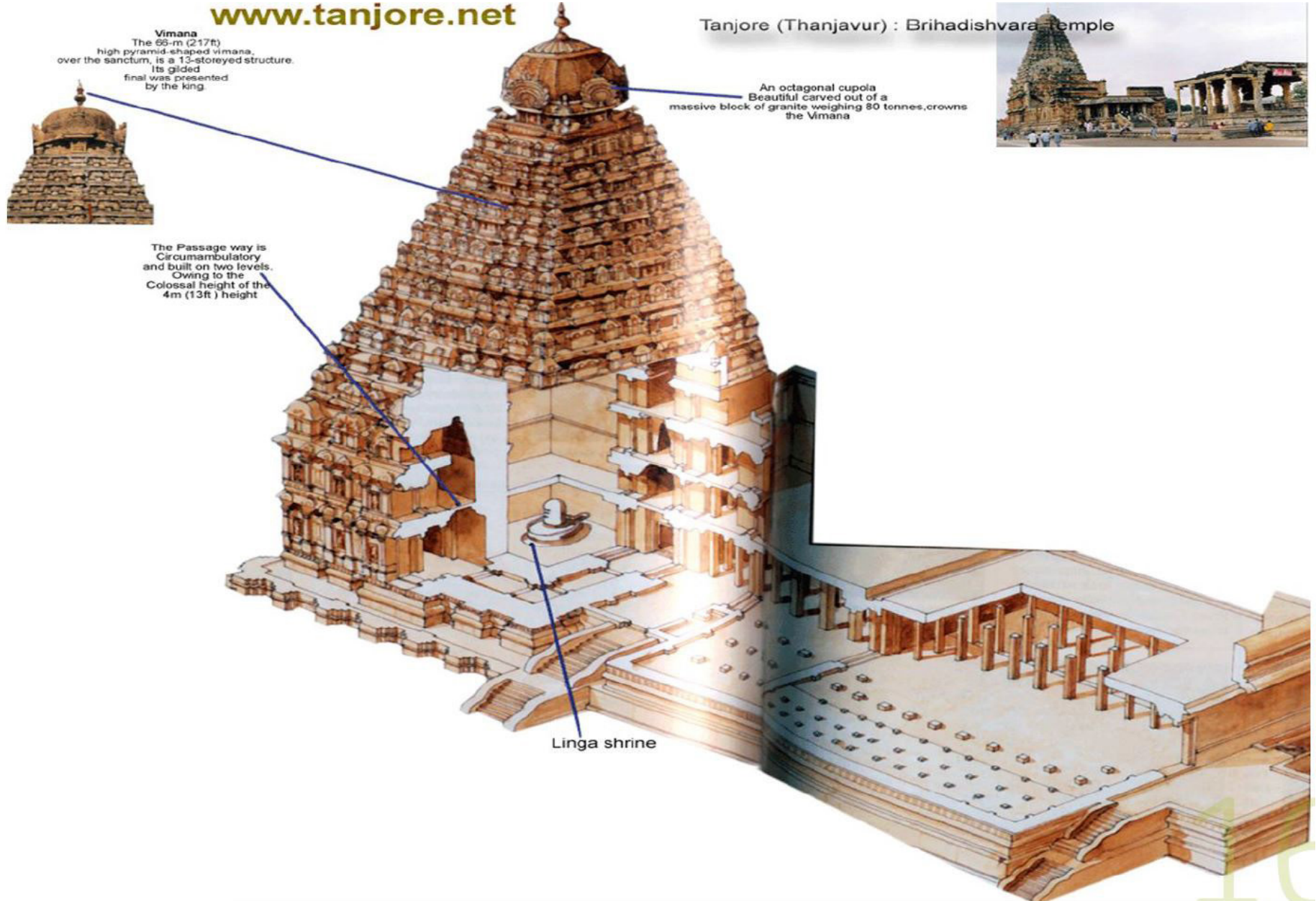
➤ A similar view of the hollow interior of the gopuram of Rajarajan Tiruvaasal.

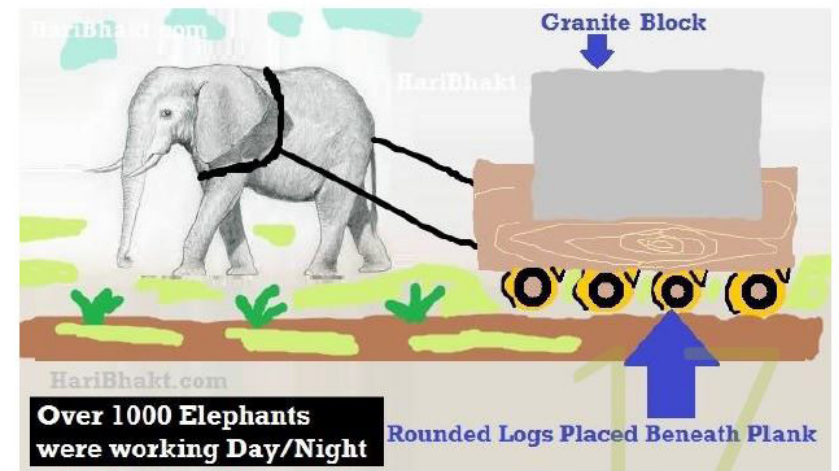
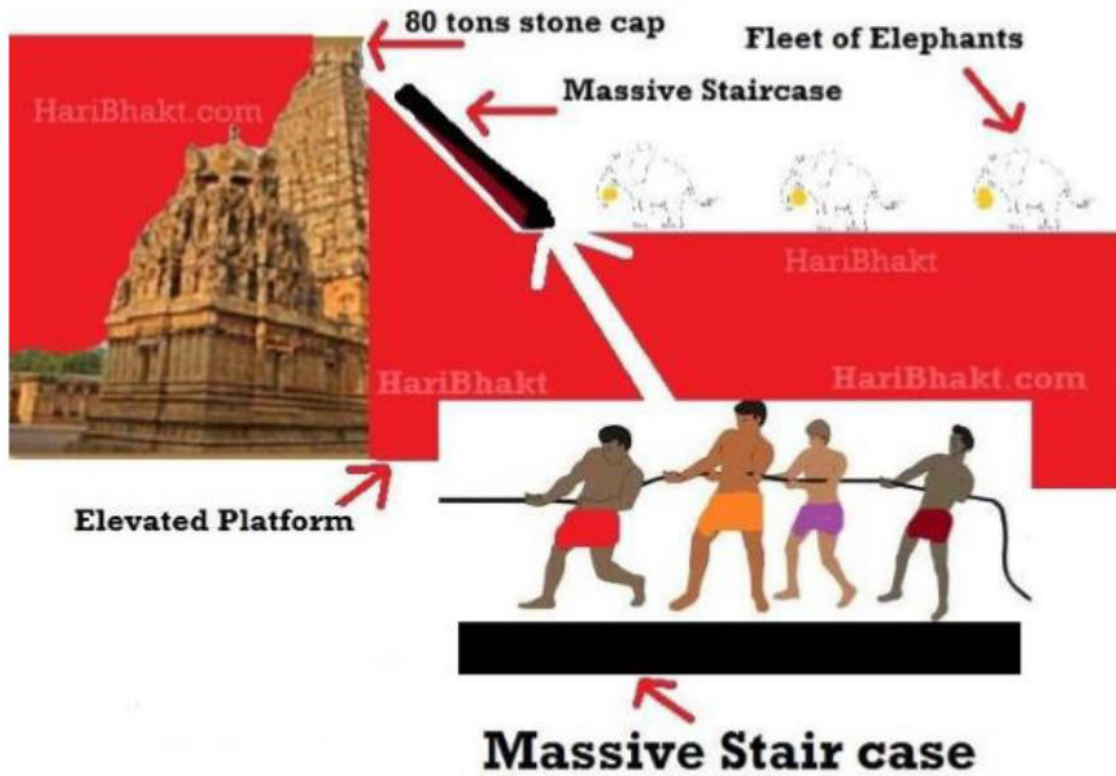
■ The hollow interior of the vimana, a view from below. Built of interlocking stones without any binding material, the vimana has not developed a crack or tilted even a few centimetres in all these years despite six earthquakes.

■ *The basic unit of the temple's layout, was taken from the main deity, the linga itself. The inner sanctum, the height of the vimana, the intermediate space between the vimana and the cloistered enclosure and the distance to the two gateways were all proportionate to the linga in a remarkable way. For instance, the height of the vimana is exactly twice the width of the outer base of the adhistana (plinth) of the sanctum. "The mathematical calculations were advanced to a great extent at the time of Rajaraja Chola."*

www.tanjore.net

Tanjore (Thanjavur) : Brihadishvara Temple





CHOLA ARCHITECTURE

Brihadeeswara Temple Thanjavur – 1000 AD

Architectural treatment:

Vertical face:

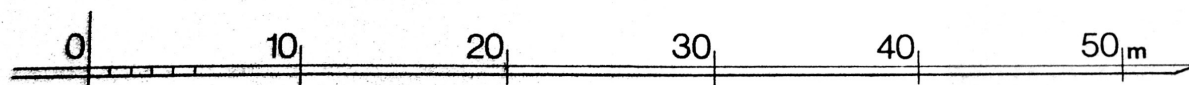
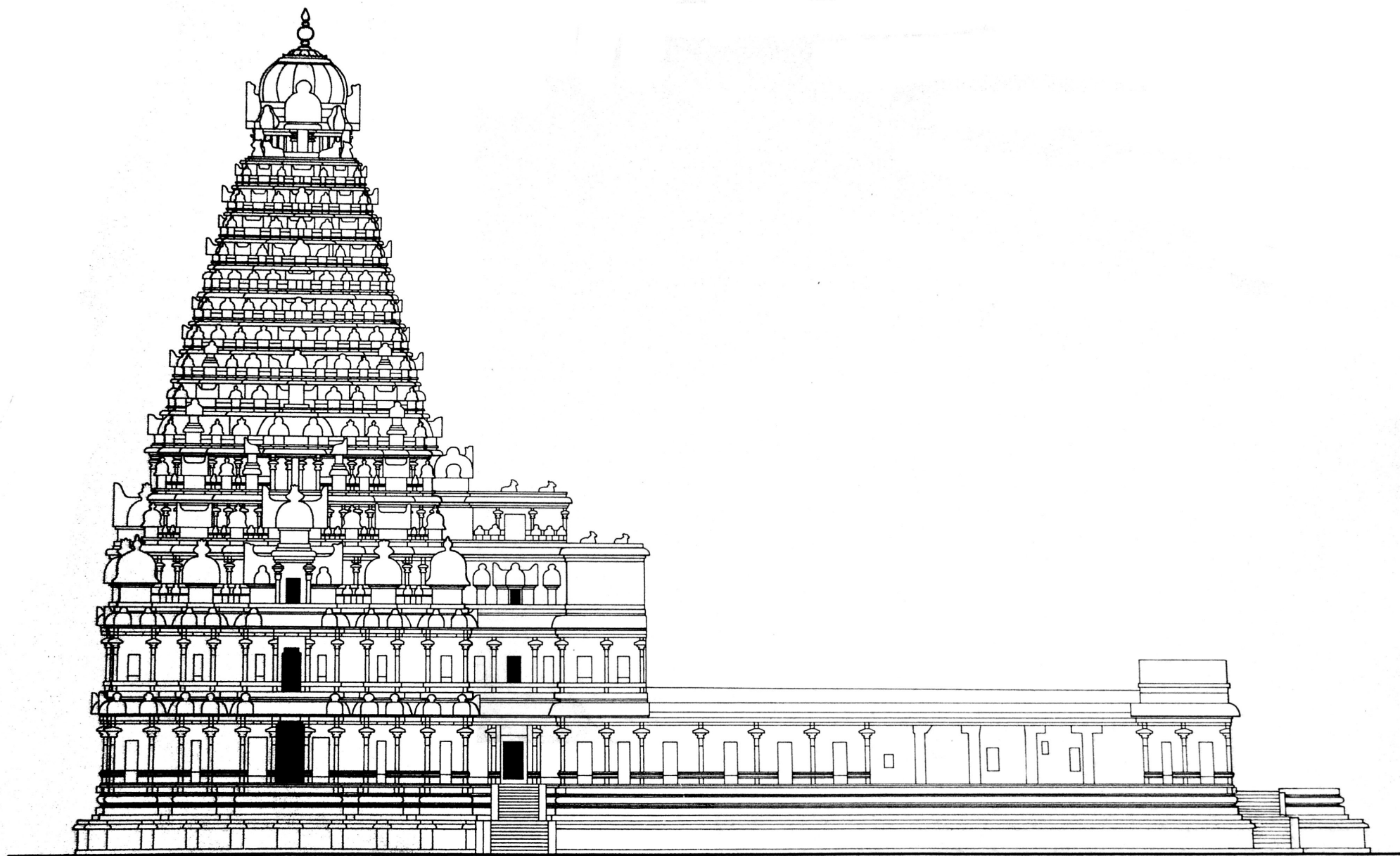
- The wall is divided into 2 stories by means of an overhanging cornice which is the only horizontal member
- Contains pilasters and niches with sculptures
- In the middle of each recess is a figure subject
- The mastery of the sculptors is seen in the **Dvarapalas** which stand guard at the gate
- The entire periphery of the temple base consists of mythical animals – lions



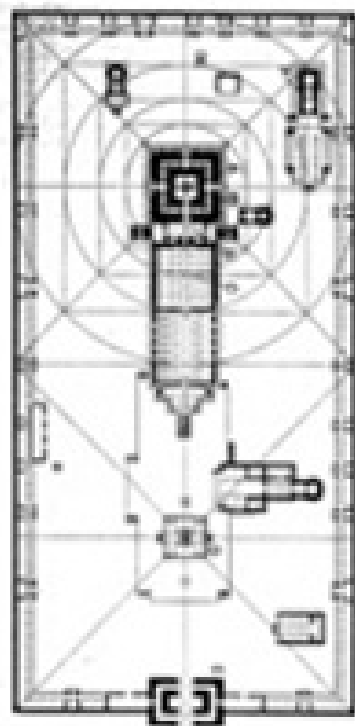
Pyramidal roof:

The surfaces are adorned with the horizontal lines of the diminishing tiers

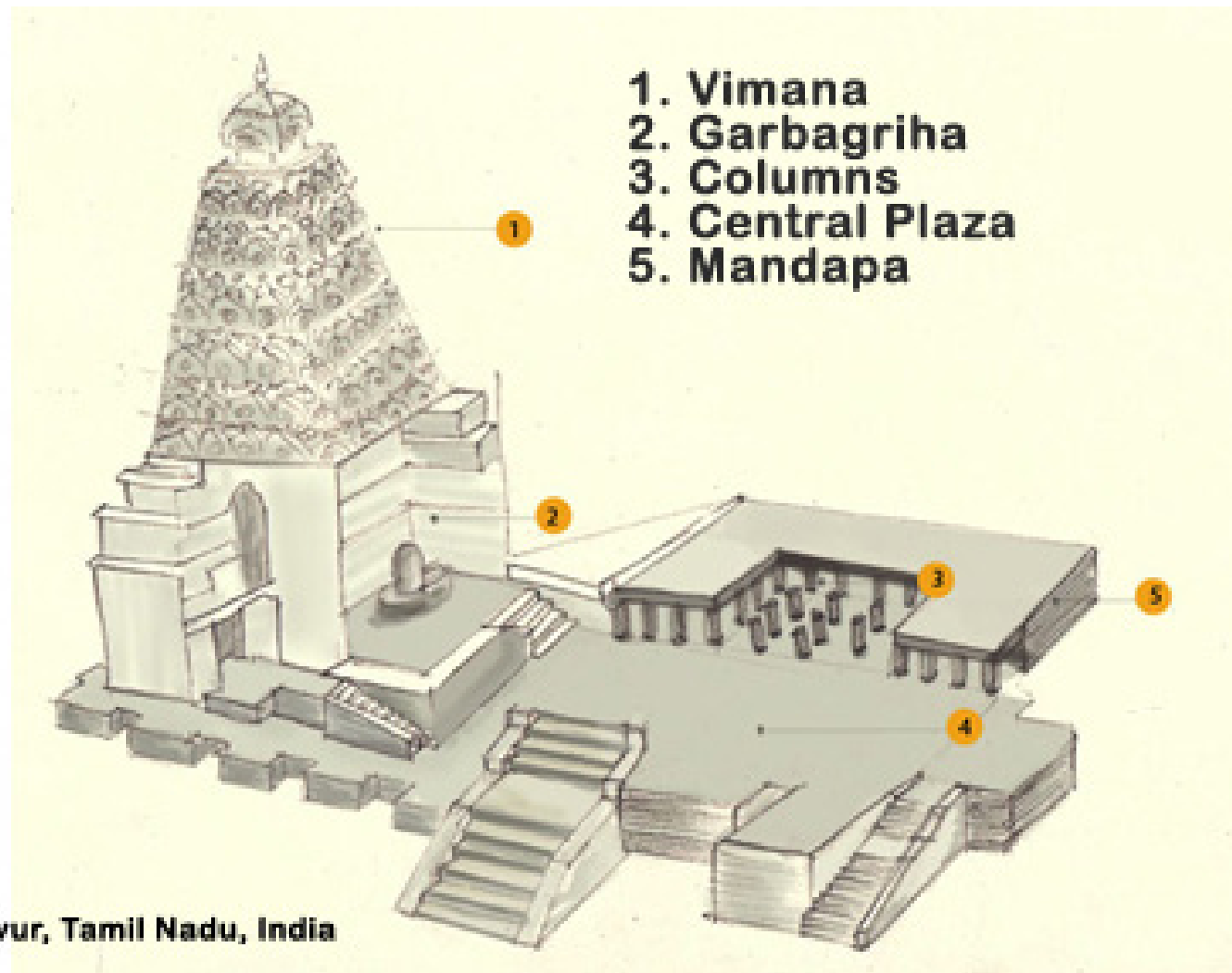
The Cupola at the summit is contrasted with the niches on all the 4 sides



b - south elevation of main shrine



PLAN OF BRIHADESHWARA TEMPLE, Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, India

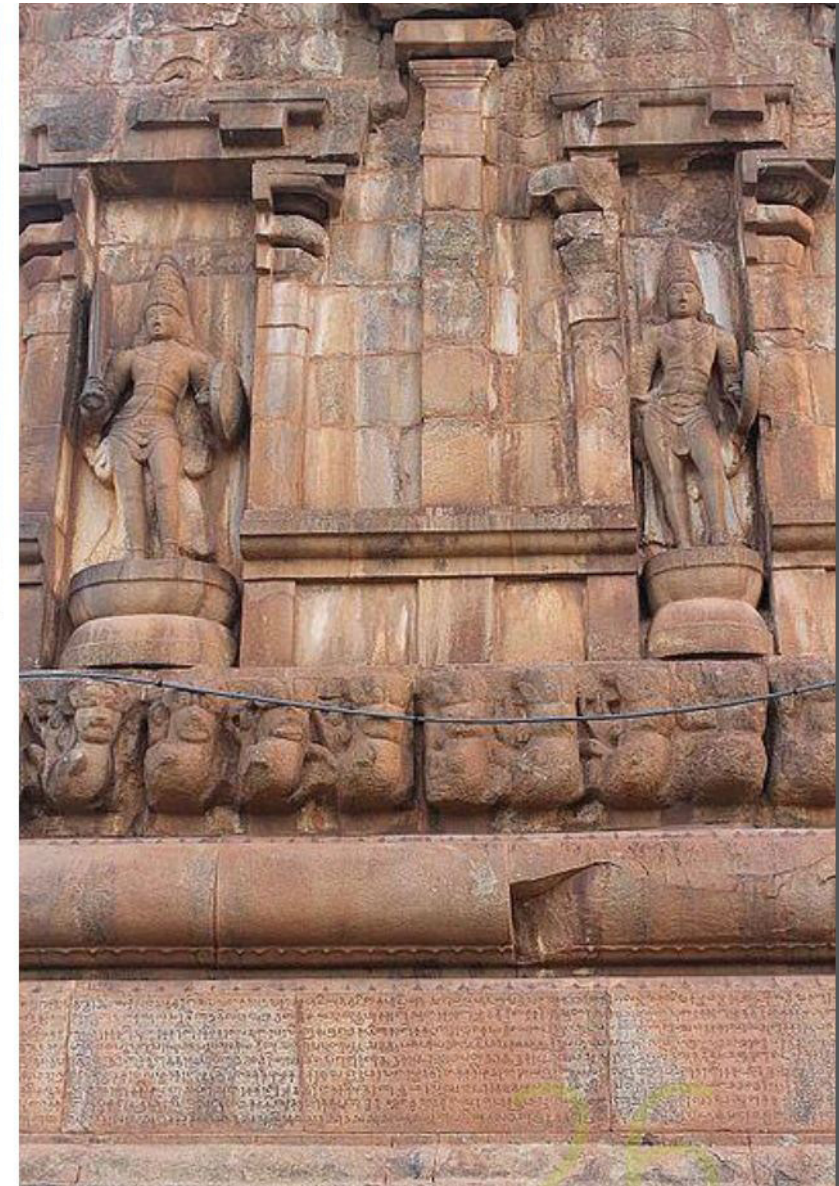






The key inscription on the base of the vimana where Rajaraja Chola says he built the stone temple and records the gifts that he, his sister, his queens and others gave the temple.

Pichard called the vimana an “architectural audacity”.



■ Brihadeeswarar Temple has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site under the list of 'Great Living Chola Temples'.

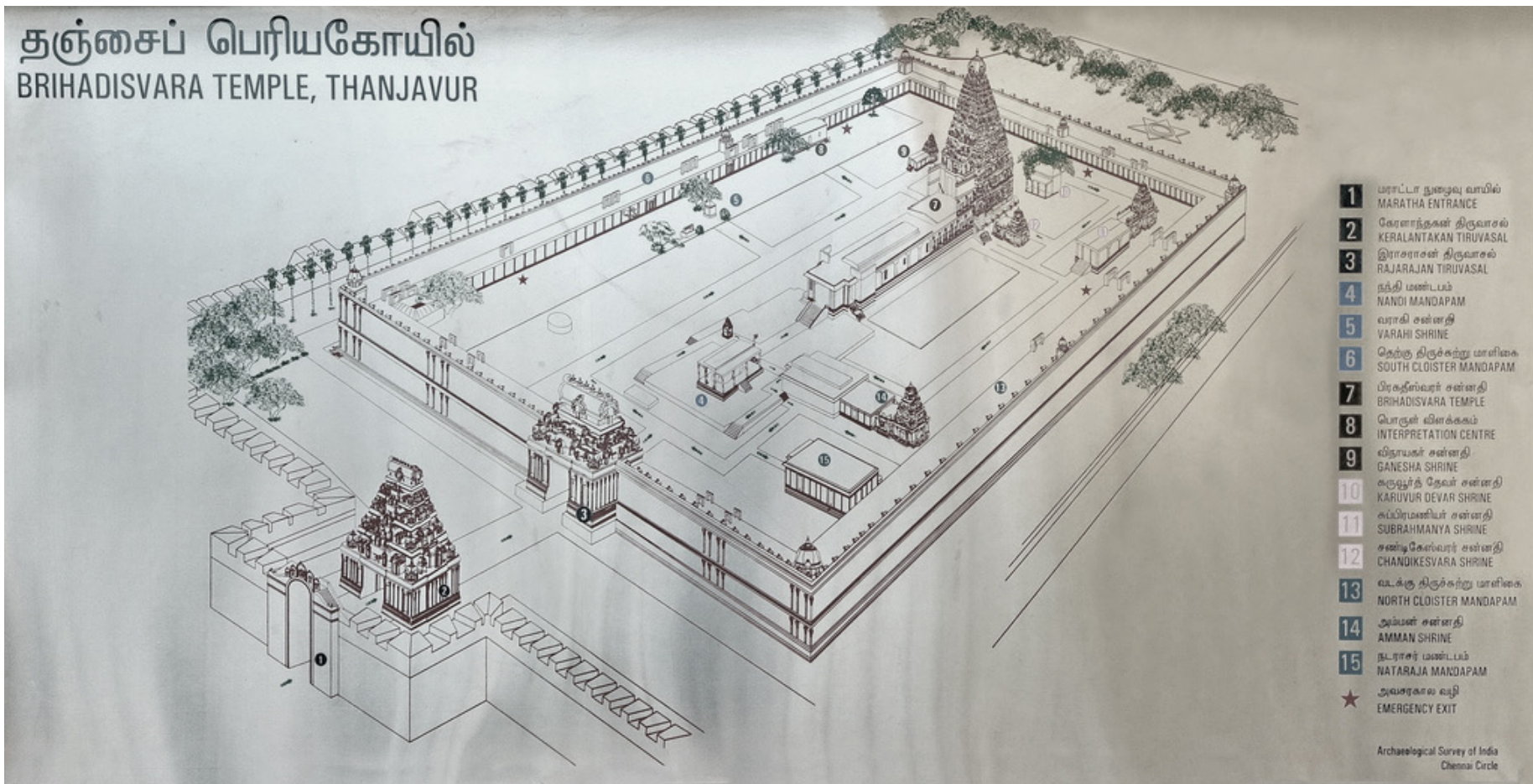
■ An approximate of 130,000 tons of granite was used in the formation of this temple.

■ The holy shrine has a temple tower (vimana) that is built at a height of 216 feet. Being the tallest in the world, it symbolizes Mount Peru. 'Gopuras' or the two gateways are located at the eastern entrance of the temple.

■ The temple's entrance has a large statue of Nandi (sacred bull) that measures about 16 feet in length and 13 feet in height. This statue has been carved out of a single stone.

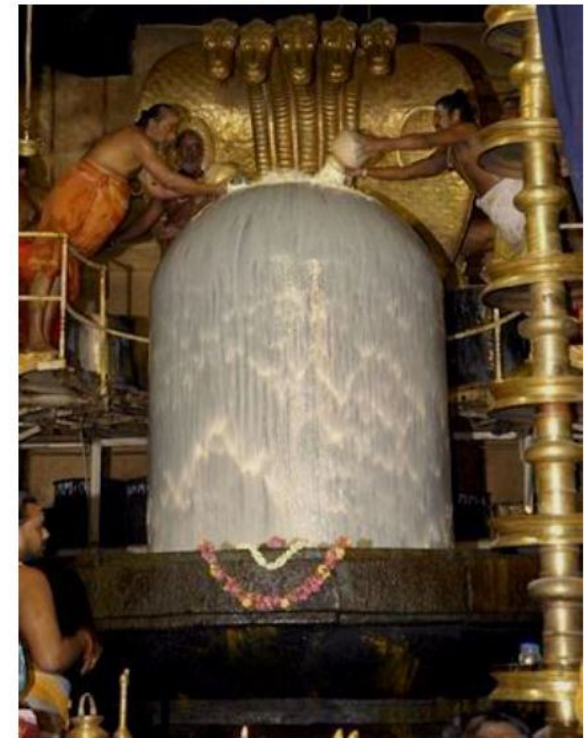


தஞ்சைப் பெரியகோயில் BRIHADISVARA TEMPLE, THANJAVUR



- ❑ 'Kumbam' is the topmost component of the holy shrine and weighs about 60 tons. It has been also carved out from a single granite stone.
- ❑ A huge idol of Lord Shiva with three eyes is present inside the temple along with the 108 dance forms or 'karmas'.
- ❑ The exterior part on the other end is decorated with sculptures. There are 250 lingams in the entire temple compound.
- ❑ This famous sanctuary is made up of a pillared hall and an assembly hall which is known as mandapas and many sub-shrines.

- The inner part of the mandapas is highly significant and is divided into various categories with the help of sculptures and pilasters.
- Being one of the rarest temples in India, the idols of 'Ashta-dikpaalakas' or guardians of directions can be found here. The six feet effigies of Agni, Varuna, Indra, Yama, Isana, Kubera and Nirriti are placed in a separate temple.
- Being a masterpiece in itself, the shadow of the tower over the gateway of the shrine never falls on the ground, more significantly in the premises of the temple.
- The altar situated at the entrance of this holy shrine has two idols of Lord Ganesha. When a person taps on any one of the idols, a sound occurs that travels towards the other idol slanting through the stone at one end and the metal to another. There are many pillars of the temple that produce such musical sounds.





The double portico of 450 m perimeter running all around the structure contains 252 lingas in black stone arranged under corbelled vaults carried on 400 pillars all around

The wall behind the portico is beautifully painted



Metres high

100

80

60

40

20

0



Big Ben's clock tower
London UK
(1858)



Big Temple, India
(11th century AD)



Leaning Tower of Pisa, Italy
(1264)

Angle of lean **0.26°**

0.0°

3.99°



The walls of the thanjai periya kovil are adorned by beautiful paintings belonging to the Chola and Nayak period.









Fig. 2
Tanjore: Great Brihadesvara Temple: c. A.D. 1000

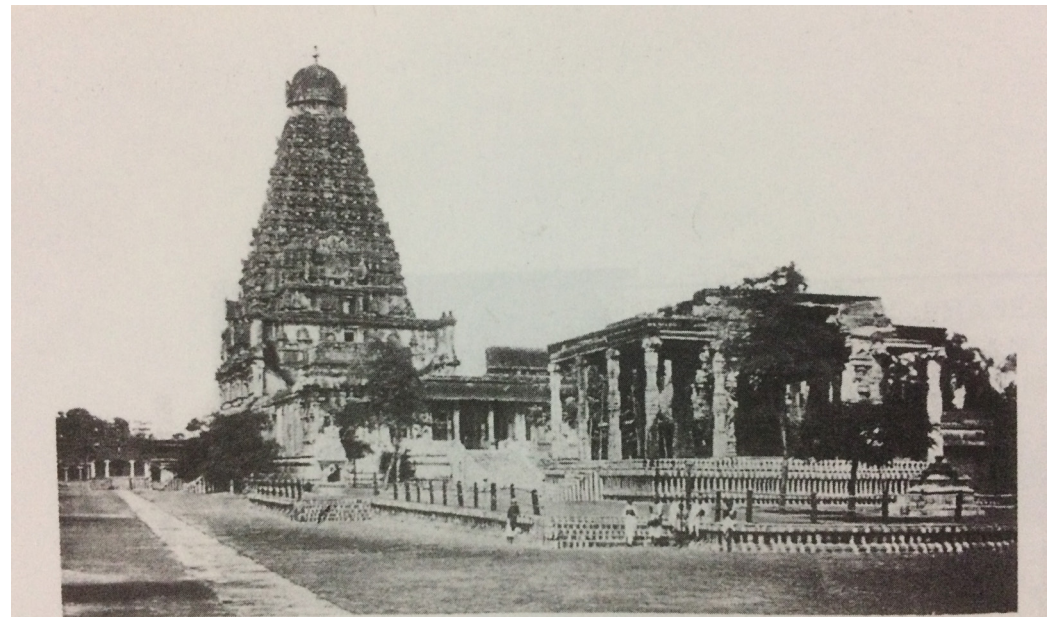


Fig. 1

Brihadeshwara temple at Gangaikonda Cholapuram



Brihadeshwara temple at Gangaikonda Cholapuram

- Gangaikonda Cholapuram was built during medieval India and was erected as the capital of the Cholas by Rajendra Chola I, the son and successor of Rajaraja Chola.
- It follows the same structural base as of Brihadeshwara temple at tanjavore.

Gangaikondacholisvaram Temple

- The second Brihadisvara temple complex, built by Rajendra I, the son and successor of Rajaraja I, was completed in 1035. The temple of Gangaikondacholisvaram is approached through the northern entrance from the road.
- The passage moves through the enclosure wall and leads on to the inner court. The 53 m Vimana has recessed corners and gracefully upward curve, which is in contrast with the straight and severe tower at Thanjavur. As it rises to a height of 160 feet and is shorter than the Thanjavur tower, it is often described as the feminine counterpart of the Thanjavur temple.
- The shrine of Chandikeswara is near the steps in the north. In the northeast are a shrine housing Durga, a well called lion-well (simhakeni) with a lion figure guarding its steps and a late mandapa housing the office. Nandi is in the east facing the main shrine.
- In the same direction is the ruined Gopura, the entrance tower. The main tower surrounded by little shrines truly presents the appearance of a great Chakravarti (emperor) surrounded by chieftains and vassals.



Fig. 1

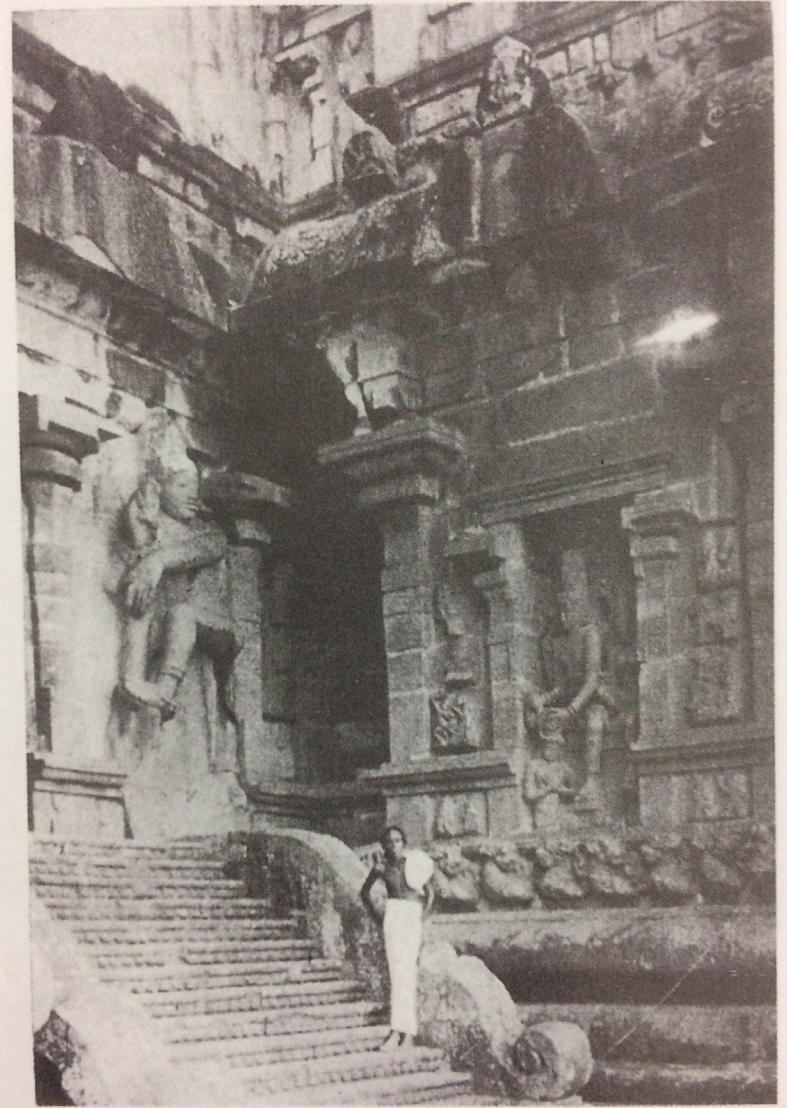


Fig. 2

